Swordquest 1

™

EARTHWORLD™

Come questing with bold siblings twain,
Prime thieves of ravaged Earth;
Next journey to the Fireworld,
Land of volcanoes' birth.
Waves without number—Water's realm—
But 'ware of evils there;
Last, ride the Air's winds heaven-high
To claim a prize most rare.

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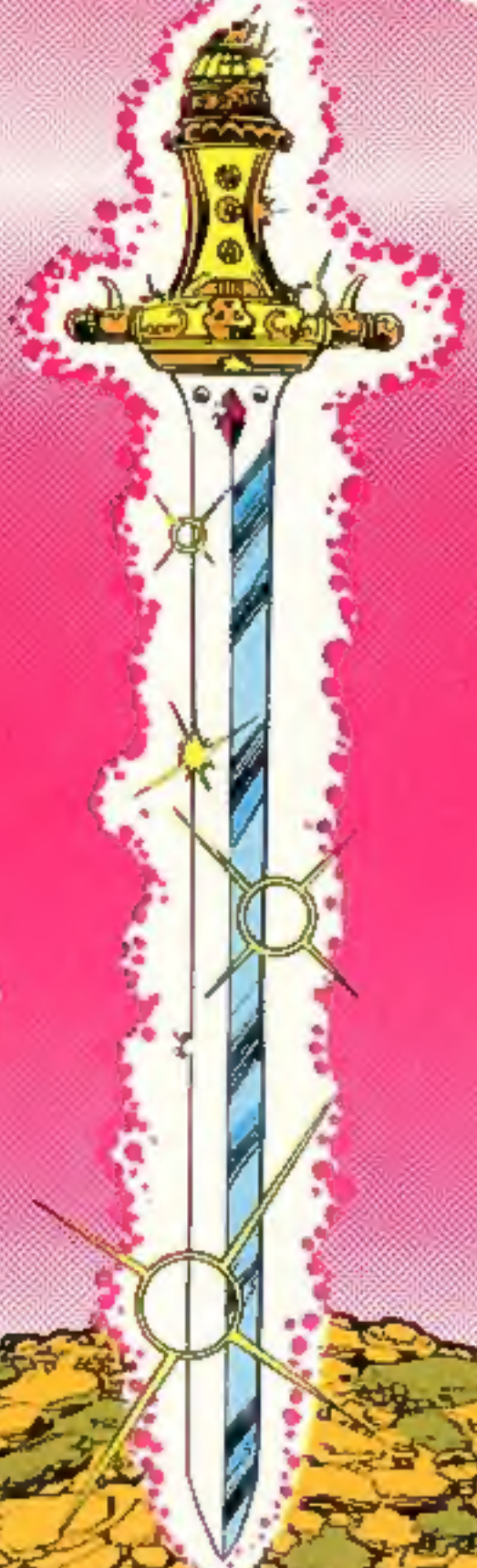

The ultimate Search for the ultimate treasure!

BOOK ONE

EARTHWORLD!

BUT THERE IS *LIFE* AMONG THE ROOFTOPS OF THESE HUDDLED BUILDINGS...

...LIFE WHICH MOVES AS SILENTLY AS THE *SHADOWS* THEMSELVES.

OR NEARLY SO...

SKATCH

TARRA--?

MEN CALL IT *DARKSPIRE CASTLE*, THEY WHO DARE SPEAK OF IT AT ALL.

LIKE A GREAT BLACK SPIDER IT BROODS ATOP *MOUNT MANDRASOR*, HIGH ABOVE THE MEDIEVAL CITY WHOSE LESSER BUILDINGS DOT THE THREE *SEAWARD* SIDES OF THE MASSIVE PEAK.

WHO *ELSE*, DEAR BROTHER?

I *FOLLOWED* YOU AFTER YOU SLIPPED OUT OF OUR *ROOM*.

I SHOULD HAVE *GUESSED* YOU'D COME HERE.

A *THIEF* HAS TO STEAL TO *EAT*, TARRA.

BUT *EATING* ISN'T ALL YOU'VE GOT ON YOUR *MIND*, IS IT, *TORR*?

YOU'RE STILL BROODING ABOUT REVENGE!

AND WHY NOT?

BECAUSE OF KING TYRANNUS, OUR PARENTS ARE DEAD.

HE AND THAT WIZARD KONJURO KILLED THEM--

--AS SURELY AS IF THEY'D DONE THE DEED THEMSELVES!

GOOD THIEVES DON'T BEAR GRUDGES, TORR!

NOR DO THEY LEAP WHEN THEY CAN WALK!

AS FOR TYRANNUS, HIS CASTLE IS A FORTRESS-- NOT EVEN AN EXPERIENCED THIEF WOULD TRY TO STEAL INSIDE DARKSPIRE!

I'VE GOT MORE EXPERIENCE THAN YOU THINK, SISTER--

--AND I'M NOT PLANNING TO STEAL FROM TYRANNUS.

NOT WHEN THE SORCERER KONJURO'S KEEP STANDS UNGUARDED ON THE GRAY SEA'S SHORE!

KONJURO?

YOU ARE MAD!

FOR AN INSTANT, THEIR EYES *LOCK* ON THAT LONELY TOWER...

...AND IT'S AS IF AN UNSUSPECTED *DAM* WERE OPENED IN THEIR HEARTS, FLOODING THEM WITH *EMOTION*, AS THEY RECALL THE *STORY* OF THEIR ORPHANING...

THEIR FATHER WAS A MIGHTY WARRIOR NAMED *TARR*, A FAITHFUL MARSHAL OF OLD *KING REULLO'S* ARMY...

...AND PROUD AS HE WAS OF HIS MANY VICTORIES ON THE BATTLEFIELD, HIS *PROUDEST* MOMENT CAME ON THE DAWN OF THE LAST DAY OF HIS *FINAL* CAMPAIGN...

TWO SONS, MY LADY?

YOU'VE GIVEN ME *TWO SONS* TO CARRY FORTH MY NAME?

BETTER THAN *THAT*, MY LORD.

A SON *AND* A DAUGHTER, AS ALIKE AS TWO FLOWERS FROM THE SAME CUTTING!

SO THEY *ARE*.

WHAT SHALL WE *NAME* THEM, WIFE?

WELL, MY LORD, I'VE BEEN *THINKING*...

NOT LONG AFTER THE TWINS' BIRTH, THE OLD KING, *REULLO*, SICKENED AND DIED...

...AND *SOME* WOULD INSIST IT WAS NO *NATURAL* DEATH WHICH CLAIMED THAT BELOVED LIEGE.

BEFORE THE TURNING OF THE NEW MOON, *LORD TARR* AND HIS WIFE, *LADY WYLA*, WERE SUMMONED TO AN AUDIENCE WITH THE NEW KING, REULLO'S DARK-BROWED SON, *TYRANNUS*.

THEY WENT *HAPPILY*, BELIEVING THEIR NEWBORNS WERE TO RECEIVE THE KING'S *BLESSING*.

TYRANNUS, HOWEVER, HAD *OTHER* IDEAS...

SO THESE ARE YOUR *WHELPS*, EH, TARR?

TWO BLOND *BABES*, STILL PEWLING AND MEWLING.

MY LEIGE! I DON'T UNDER-STAND--!

DO YOU UNDERSTAND *TREACHERY*, TARR?

NOT TREACHERY HERE AND NOW, BUT TREACHERY TO *COME*?

TREACHERY AS YET *UNBORN*-- OR SHOULD I SAY, *NEWBORN*?

LAST NIGHT, I RECEIVED A *WARNING*, A *PROPHECY*, IF YOU WILL, FROM A MAN STEEPED IN THE WISDOM OF *DARK MAGIC!*

HIS WORDS:

"*BEWARE THE CHILDREN WITH HAIR OF GOLD*-- TWO THEY ARE, BORN THE SON AND DAUGHTER OF A NOBLE *WARRIOR!*"

"*WHEN THOU ART OLD AND FEEBLE, THEY SHALL CLAIM THY THRONE, WITH A SWORD SHINING BRIGHTLY AS SUMMER'S SUN!*"

WHAT WOULD *YOU* CALL THIS, TARR--

--*IF NOT TREACHERY MOST FOUL!*

YOUR MAJESTY *CANNOT* BE SERIOUS!

SUCH PROPHECY IS *MADNESS!*

WHO *SPEAKS* THUS?

LET HIM *SHOW* HIMSELF, IF HE DARE!

IN TIME PAST, MY FATHER WAS COUNSELED BY TWO MYSTIC *MAGES*--

--BUT SINCE THEY *VANISHED* FROM THE KEN OF MEN WHEN I WAS STILL A CHILD, I HAVE HAD TO TURN TO A *MORE EARTHLY* SOURCE OF WISDOM.

KONJURO, WIZARD OF SEA KEEP, STEP FORTH--

TELL THE *LORD TARR* WHAT YOU TOLD *ME*.

THE INFANTS MUST DIE.

NO!

THEN YOU SHALL DIE BESIDE THEM.

THE KING GAVE A SUBTLE *SIGNAL*--

--AND AT *ONCE*, THE CHAMBER SWARMED WITH ARMED MEN:

YOU LEAVE ME WITH BUT *ONE* THING TO SAY, YOUR MAJESTY...

DEATH TO TYRANNUS!

DEATH TO THE KING!

HE ALMOST REACHED THE THRONE

ALMOST, BUT NOT QUITE!

RUN, WYLA!

FOR THE LOVE OF OUR CHILDREN--

"--RUN!"

WAS THERE *EVER* SUCH A BATTLE AS THIS?

ONE AGAINST A *SCORE*, AND THAT ONE ARMED WITH LITTLE *MORE* THAN A *SWORD* AND A NOBLE *HEART*?

WIZARD, *DO* SOMETHING!

OF ALL *MY* GUARDS, ONLY *THESE* COULD I TRUST WITH SUCH A DEED!

IF HE GETS PAST *THEM*--

HE SHALL NOT

MUTTERED WORDS IN A TONGUE *ALIEN* TO THE MOUTH OF MAN...

KATHU MORUS MAHKTO!

--AND THEN, HE HAD NOT EVEN THE *SWORD* WITH WHICH TO *DEFEND* HIMSELF--

--AND AGAINST STEEL SPEARS AND IRON-TIPPED LANCES, A NOBLE HEART MADE POOR ARMOR INDEED.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN GLOATING, YOUR MAJESTY, MIGHT I REMIND YOU... MOTHER AND CHILDREN YET LIVE.

A TEMPORARY CONDITION, AT WORST.

YOU MEN-- FIND THE MOTHER AND BRING THE CHILDREN TO ME.

AND THE MOTHER--?

WHAT DO YOU THINK, FOOL?

"SLAY HER WHERE SHE STANDS!"

AH, BUT FIRST THEY HAD TO FIND HER, AND IN A DARKENED CITY FILLED WITH BLACK MOON-SHADOWS, THAT TASK MIGHT PROVE MORE DIFFICULT THAN IT MIGHT SEEM...

THE KING'S GUARDS!

THAT CAN ONLY MEAN... TARR IS..

SHE CHOKED BACK A *SOB*, THIS WAS NO TIME FOR *TEARS*.

AS THE CHATTER OF HORSEHOOVES BEAT A *HUNTER'S MARCH* ON THE COBBLES OF THE CITY, GROWING FAINT AND LOUD BY TURNS, SHE LET *MEMORY* GUIDE HER TO A SMALL HOUSE JUST INSIDE THE CITY'S WALLS...

FREEMAN GARTH, YOU WERE ONCE MY HUSBAND'S FAITHFUL *SCOUT*.

ARE YOU FAITHFUL *STILL*?

EH? 'PON MY SOUL, IT'S *LADY WYLA!*

YOU SHOULDN'T BE SEEN *HERE*, MILADY, NOT IN THE HOUSE OF A *THIEF!*

LET HER IN, GARTH-- CAN'T YOU SEE SHE'S *TERRIFIED*?

IT'S YOU WHO SHOULDN'T BE SEEN WITH *ME*, FREEMAN. LISTEN...

WORDS TUMBLED OUT, AND NOW THE TEARS COULD *NOT* BE HELD BACK...

MILORD TARR *KILLED*?

STAY, MILADY, AND I'LL GET MY *DAGGER*--

I DON'T THINK SHE CAME HERE SEEKING *THAT* KIND OF HELP, HUSBAND.

IT'S THE *CHILDREN*... ISN'T IT, MILADY?

YES...

...WITH ME, THEY ARE MARKED FOR *DEATH*.

BUT IN *YOUR* HOUSE, RAISED AS *YOUR* SON AND DAUGHTER...

AYE, IT'S WORTH A *TRY*.

WE ALWAYS *WANTED* YOUNG 'UNS... BUT WHAT ABOUT *YOU*, MILADY?

WITHOUT MY *CHILDREN*-- WITHOUT MY *HUSBAND*-- MY LIFE IS A DRY *SHELL*.

TO SAVE THEM, I MUST *ABANDON* THEM.

AND YOU *ASK*-- WHAT ABOUT ME?

CARE FOR THEM.

LOVE THEM AS YOU WOULD YOUR OWN.

GROW THEM *STRONG* AND *BRAVE*... THAT'S *ALL* I ASK

AS FOR ME, I HAVE ONE LAST *DUTY* TO PERFORM..

...AND THEN I MAY *REST* ONCE MORE...

...IN MY LOVING HUSBAND'S *ARMS*!

THERE SHE IS!

WE HAVE HER NOW, BY HEAVEN!

THAT PATH LEADS TO THE EDGE OF MERCY CLIFF!

THERE'S NO WAY DOWN... NO WAY TO CUT BACK ON HER TRAIL!

"SHE CANNOT ESCAPE US!"

BUT, THERE IS MORE THAN ONE WAY TO ESCAPE DESPOTIC OPPRESSION, AS THE CAPTAIN OF TYRANNUS' PALACE GUARD SOON DISCOVERED TO HIS UNBELIEVING HORROR...

NAY, IT CANNOT BE!

...ONE ESCAPE, FOR THOSE WITH NOWHERE ELSE TO GO...

MOTHER AND CHILDREN WERE REPORTED *DEAD*, THEIR BODIES CLAIMED BY A GREEDY *SEA*.

SAFE, PROTECTED BY ANONYMITY THE *TWINS* GREW AND LEARNED; AND, BY A TWISTING OF FATE, BECAME *THIEVES* TO SURVIVE, WHEN THEIR FOSTER-PARENTS DIED...

NOW *MEMORY* FADES...

AND THEY TURN THEIR ATTENTION TO MORE *IMMEDIATE* CONCERNS, SUCH AS THE SCALING OF THE WIZARD'S "*IMPREGNABLE*" TOWER...

AN *OPENING* IN THE TOWER'S CROWN LEADS DOWN INTO A DARKNESS *MADE LIGHTER* BY A FAINT GLIMMERING...

PSST, TORR!

CAN YOU *SEE* ANYTHING?

BRACE YOURSELF, SISTER...

...IT'S A *TREASURE HOUSE!*

THAT DARK WIZARD MUST HAVE COLLECTED A *FORTUNE* FROM THE KING FOR HIS *COUNSELING* ALL THESE YEARS!

WE'RE RICH!

WHY, THERE'S *GOLD* ENOUGH HERE TO BUY US A *KINGDOM* OF OUR OWN, IF WE WANTED...

TOO MUCH OF THAT YELLOW METAL CAN WEIGH A THIEF DOWN, TORR.

ME, I PREFER A MORE PORTABLE TREASURE.

THIS STRANGE JEWEL, FOR INSTANCE. I WAGER IT'S WORTH MORE THAN ALL THE GOLDEN GOBLETS IN THE WORLD--

YOU ARE RIGHT, CHILD.

ITS WORTH IS FAR GREATER THAN YOUR PITIFUL MORTAL MIND MAY FATHOM.

REPLACE IT AT ONCE, AND I PROMISE YOU AN EASY DEATH.

THE WIZARD!

TO THE ROPE, TORR --HURRY!

"TORR"?

BY THE SEVEN HELLS, IS IT POSSIBLE?

THEY YET LIVE!

AYE, BUT NOT FOR LONG...

WHY DON'T WE KILL HIM?

WHY ARE WE FLEEING?

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW WHY, LOOK UP--

--BUT DON'T STOP RUNNING!

IT LOOMS OUT OF THE STARRY SKY, AT FIRST SO DISTANT IT SEEMS NO LARGER THAN A SMALL BIRD...

.. BUT AS IT RAPIDLY CLOSES IN, ITS TRUE SIZE BECOMES APPARENT...

RRRR

..AND TORR NO LONGER QUESTIONS THE WISDOM OF FLIGHT!

RAARR

MERCY CLIFF UP AHEAD..

JUMP!

ABOVE THEM, KONJURO'S MYSTICALLY-SUMMONED DEMON *RAGES* WITH UNNATURAL FURY...

...FLINGING BOLT AFTER BOLT OF *WITCHFIRE* AT THE FLEEING SHADOWS BENEATH THE GREY SEA'S SURFACE...

BUT, THE TROUBLE WITH CHASING *SHADOWS*--

--IS THAT YOUR *TRUE* TARGETS OFTEN SLIP AWAY..

GASP!... FEEL LIKE MY *BRAIN'S* ABOUT TO BURST...!

ARE YOU *ALL RIGHT?*

I'LL LIVE.

KONJURO'S *DEMON..?*

HE'S STILL CIRCLING AROUND BETWEEN US AND THE MAINLAND.

BUT HE'S DRAWING CLOSER TO SHORE WITH EACH CIRCLE...

...ALMOST AS IF HE COULD SENSE OUR PRESENSE!

AT LEAST WE GOT SOMETHING OUT OF THIS FIASCO.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

THIS.

THE WIZARD'S JEWEL!

THAT MUST BE HOW THE DEMON'S TRACKING US!

HE CAN SMELL THAT JEWEL!

OF ALL THE STUPID--

GET RID OF IT!

TORR! HAVE YOU LOST YOUR SENSES?

OH!

GHINNK

AT LAST!

WHAT WAS WRITTEN BEFORE YOU WERE BORN HAS COME TO PASS!

TORR...

DON'T WORRY, TARRA-- I SEE IT TOO!

W-WHO ARE YOU?

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO TO US?

ONCE, WE HAD *HUMAN* NAMES, EVEN AS YOU.

BUT THAT WAS *BEFORE* OUR TRANSFIGURATION TO A HIGHER STAGE OF SENTIENT LIFE.

YOU MAY CALL US *MENTORR* AND *MENTARRA*, AS DID *KING RUELLO* WHEN WE WERE HIS MOST RESPECTED *COUNSELORS*.. DECADES PAST, BEFORE THE BLACK WIZARD *KOKUNARD* DID IMPRISON US IN YONDER SHATTERED JEWEL!

BUT IT IS NOT OF *THIS* WE WISH TO SPEAK...

RATHER, WE WOULD TELL YOU OF YOUR *DESTINY*.. A DESTINY THAT WILL TAKE YOU ACROSS *FOUR WORLDS!*

REVENGE!

YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT *REVENGE* AGAINST *TYRANNUS* AND *THE WIZARD!*

SURMOUNTING THESE CHALLENGES WILL MAKE YOU *STRONGER, WISER, MORE COURAGEOUS--*

--AND IN THE END, WILL GIVE YOU YOUR *HEART'S DESIRE!*

A WORLD OF *EARTH SPIRITS*... A WORLD OF *FIRE*... A WORLD OF *WATER SPRITES*... AND LAST, A WORLD OF *AIR!*

ON EACH WORLD, YOU WILL ENCOUNTER A *CHALLENGE*-- PERHAPS MORE THAN ONE!

THESE ARE YOUR WORDS, NOT OURS.

TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOAL, YOU MUST BE WILLING TO LEARN WHAT EACH WORLD CAN TEACH YOU.

YOU MUST HAVE OPEN MINDS, AND YES, OPEN HEARTS AS WELL.

YOU MUST PUT ASIDE YOUR ANGER AND YOUR HATE.

YOU MUST LEARN TO THINK BEFORE ACTING.

YOU MUST LEARN TO JUDGE BEFORE RESPONDING

REMEMBER THIS-- THE MOST DIRECT ROUTE IS NOT NECESSARILY THE CORRECT ONE.

THE GREATEST WARRIOR IS NOT ALWAYS THE STRONGEST.

NOW OBSERVE THE PRIZE THAT AWAITS YOU--

--THE SWORD OF ULTIMATE SORCERY!

THE TALISMAN OF THE PENULTIMATE TRUTH!

THUNDER ROCKS THE QUIET GLADE, AND WHEN IT PASSES, AND THE SMOKE LIFTS TWISTING INTO THE TWILIGHT SKY.

A PIT!

THIS WASN'T HERE A MOMENT AGO!

IT LOOKS DEEP ENOUGH TO REACH THE VERY HEART OF THE WORLD!

WISE WORDS, TORR, AND TRUER THAN YOU KNOW.

DESCEND, AND YOU WILL ENTER THE FIRST OF THE FOUR WORLDS YOU MUST CONQUER... EARTHWORLD!

OBSERVE... LEARN.. AND TRIUMPH!

THEY'RE FADING AWAY!

LET THEM.

THEY'VE TOLD US ALL WE NEED TO KNOW

HAVE THEY?

I WISH I WAS AS SURE AS YOU ARE, TORR.

WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF?

WELL, FOR *ONE* THING--*THAT!*

THE SHAFT *ENDS* OVER SOME KIND OF *CIRCULAR DOME*--WITH *TWELVE CHAMBERS* AROUND THE OUTSIDE RING!

THE *SWORD OF ULTIMATE SORCERY* MUST BE IN ONE OF THOSE CHAMBERS--THAT'S *OBVIOUS!*

FINDING IT IS JUST A PROCESS OF *ELIMINATION!*

CHILD'S PLAY!

THINK YOU *SO*, YELLOW-HAIRED *WHELP?*

HERMINUS THE THIEF HAS BEEN TRYING TO FIND THAT SWORD FOR ALMOST *TWELVE MOONS!*

I'VE INVESTED TOO MUCH *TIME* AND *PAIN* IN THE SEARCH TO WELCOME A PAIR OF *RIVALS!*

EVEN SUCH A PAIR OF *FOOLS* AS *YOU!*

SNIK!

EEOWW

WHUMP

UNNNH... IF WE'D DROPPED ANY FARTHER, THE FALL MIGHT HAVE KILLED US!

THE GRAPPLING HOOK MUST HAVE COME LOOSE!

WRONG. TAKE A LOOK

THIS ROPE'S BEEN CUT.

CUT?

THEN THAT MEANS--

UH-HUH.

SOMEONE DOWN HERE DOESN'T LIKE US, BROTHER.

I SUGGEST WE SPLIT UP-- EACH LOOK FOR A WAY INTO THIS DOME.

AND KEEP OUR DAGGERS VERY HANDY.

BE CAREFUL, TARRA.

I'M NOT THE IMPETUOUS ONE, TORR

LET'S BOTH BE CAREFUL...

...AND PRAY THAT BEING CAREFUL IS ENOUGH!

THERE'S THE *REST* OF THE ROPE.

THE HOOK *MUST'VE SLIPPED* WHEN WE FELL.

I MIGHT AS WELL *COLLECT* IT AND--

EH?

HOUNDS OF DARKSPIRE!

THE ROOF'S *GIVING WAY!* I'M--

OOF!

THAT WAS STUPID.

ALL THAT *TALK* ABOUT BEING CAREFUL AND THE FIRST THING I DO IS FALL THROUGH A *ROOF!*

DO NOT *CHIDE* YOURSELF, CHILD.

HUH?

ONLY THROUGH A CHAMBER BELONGING TO AN *EARTH SIGN* MAY YOU ENTER THIS MYSTIC REALM OF OURS--*YOUR* ENTRY WAS SIMPLY *MORE DRAMATIC* THAN MOST.

BUT, I SEE THAT I HAVE *STARTLED* YOU.. AND THIS *SHAMES* ME.

ORDINARILY, I AM *MOST* DEMURE, I *ASSURE* YOU.

PLEASE, BE AT *EASE*... RELAX, AND LET THE SOOTHING *MUSIC* OF MY CHAMBER BE A BALM FOR YOUR WEARY *SOUL*

I AM *VIRGO*. PLEASE CONSIDER YOURSELF MY *GUEST*.

ELSEWHERE..

I'VE CIRCLED THIS HUGE DOME *TWICE*--

--AND THE ONLY THING EVEN *APPROACHING* A DOOR THAT I'VE FOUND IS THIS *CREVICE*.

WHUUF... IT'S A GOOD THING THIEVES DON'T EAT TOO *REGULARLY*..

.. OR I'D *NEVER* MAKE IT THROUGH!

THERE! I'M *IN!*

NOW TO--

THUMP

THE *CREVICE* --IT *SLAMMED SHUT* BEHIND *ME!*

HA HA HA!

OF *COURSE*, *BOY!*

I GET SO *FEW* VISITORS--

--I LIKE TO MAKE **SURE** THAT THOSE WHO STUMBLE IN... **STAY** A WHILE!

WHO *ARE* YOU--*WHAT* ARE YOU?

YOU DON'T KNOW? AH, THEN YOU'RE IGNORANT AS WELL AS PRESUMPTUOUS!

YOU'VE ENTERED THE EARTH-SIGN CHAMBER, BOY!

TWO DOORS LEAD FROM THIS CHAMBER TO THOSE ON EITHER SIDE, BUT THOSE DOORS ARE LOCKED AND I HAVE THE ONLY KEY!

AND WHO AM I?

I AM TAURUS, THE BULL-- AND YOU ARE MY PRISONER!

AND I AM TORR, SON OF TARR, THE GREATEST WARRIOR WHO EVER LIVED!

YOU DON'T FRIGHTEN ME, TAURUS!

NOT WHILE I HAVE THIS!

BOY--

--YOU IRRITATE ME!

BTHAM!

M-MY DAGGER WENT IN TO THE HILT..

...BUT YOU'RE NOT EVEN BLEEDING!

WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?

I AM A LIVING INCARNATION OF ZODIACAL MYSTICISM!

YOUR METAL CANNOT HARM ME--

--BUT I CAN HARM YOU!

WHAT--?

THE KEY! CURSE YOU, YOU'VE STOLEN THE KEY!

HIS *CHARGE* IS CARRYING HIM CLEAR ACROSS THE CHAMBER!

HAVE TO *UNLOCK* THIS DOOR BEFORE HE CAN *TURN* ABOUT--!

A TWIST OF METAL IN *METAL* AND THE HUGE VAULT-LIKE DOOR SWINGS OPEN; A MOMENT LATER...

I'M *THROUGH*-- AND THE DOOR'S SHUT TIGHTLY AS A WIZARD'S *PURSE!*

LET'S SEE *TAURUS* GET PAST *THAT!*

STRANGE *CORRIDOR*..IT SEEMS TO BE MOVING PAST *FASTER* THAN I'M RUNNING!

ANOTHER DOOR *UP AHEAD*..

WILL I FIND THE *SWORD* IN *THERE?*

THE ONLY THING YOU'LL FIND IN THERE, YOU YOUNG *CUTPURSE*..

...IS A *SPEEDY DEATH!*

IN THE CHAMBER OF *VIRGO*...

SO. . YOU SEEK THE *SWORD OF ULTIMATE SORCERY.*

IT WAS *WRITTEN* THAT ONE DAY YOU WOULD COME--YOU AND A FAIR-HAIRED BOY, WHO TOGETHER WOULD FORGE A GREAT *DESTINY.*

GODS.

BUT YOU WILL NEED *HELP*-- A WAY TO TRAVEL *BETWEEN* THE ZODIACAL CHAMBERS--

--AND YOU WILL FIND IT THERE, IN THE *STAR OF PASSAGE!*

IT'S *BEAUTIFUL.*

BUT HOW CAN I GET IT OUT OF THAT *GLOBE?*

PERHAPS BREAK THE GLASS WITH MY *DAGGER..?*

SOME *SIXTH SENSE* FREEZES HER HAND, AS SHE HEARS A STRANGE *RUSTLE* BEHIND HER--

--LIKE THE LEATHERY WHISPER OF *INHUMAN WINGS...*

HOT BREATH WARMS HER NECK.

PART OF HER SCREAMS A WARNING-- "USE THE DAGGER! DEFEND YOURSELF!"

...TRUSTING TO SHEER *WILL* TO ACHIEVE HER GOAL.

GOOD.

YOU'VE PASSED THE *FIRST* TEST.

VIRGO! BUT I THOUGHT YOU'D BECOME SOME KIND OF--OF *MONSTER!*

WAS THAT AN *ILLUSION?*

NO, CHILD. I SIMPLY *RESPONDED* TO POTENTIAL *VIOLENCE.*

HAD YOU *PERSISTED*, I MIGHT HAVE *KILLED* YOU--OR *YOU* MIGHT HAVE KILLED *ME.*

SUCH REACTIONS ARE *BEYOND* MY CONTROL.

BUT I AM *PLEASED* THE CONFRONTATION WAS AVOIDED.

NOW LET THE STAR TAKE YOU WHERE IT *WILL..*

.. AND MAY THE *LORDS OF THE ZODIAC* KEEP YOU SAFE!

BUT A *GENTLER* ASPECT OF HER SOUL *REBELS*, AND THRUSTS BLADE BACK INTO SHEATHE...

A MOMENT OF BLINDING LIGHT AND, WHEN IT FADES, TARRA FINDS HERSELF IN A SWEET-SMELLING GARDEN...

...LISTENING TO THE MUSIC OF A VERY STRANGE PIPER INDEED.

AH, A VISITOR. HOW DELIGHTFUL.

COME PLAY WITH CAPRICORN, MY DEAR.

PLAY WITH ME--

--OR DIE!

NO THANKS, GOAT.

I'M LOOKING FOR MY BROTHER, AND I CAN'T STOP TO PLAY UNTIL I--

SNORT-SNORT

--FIND HIM.

TORR BLINKS *TWICE*, AND SHAKES HIS HEAD AS IF TO *CLEAR* IT; NOT QUITE SURE IF HE'S LOST HIS *MIND*.

THE *CORRIDOR* FROM THE CHAMBER OF TAURUS LED HIM TO *ANOTHER* LOCKED DOOR, WHICH OPENED AT A TOUCH OF HIS KEY; HE STEPPED THROUGH. .

...INTO A SCENE OF *SHEER NIGHTMARE*.

WHO ENTERS THE MIRRORED HALL OF GEMINI?

IDENTIFY YOURSELF, AND PERHAPS I SHALL LET YOU LIVE!

I THINK I'LL JUST TAKE MY CHANCES WITH *TAURUS*, IF YOU DON'T MIND--

OH, BUT I DO MIND!

THERE ARE NO TWO WAYS ABOUT IT, YOUTH--

SLAM!

--YOU WILL NEVER LEAVE THIS CHAMBER ALIVE!

THERE IS A *FLICKER OF SHADOW* IN THE MIRROR BEHIND THE BIZARRE WHITE CREATURE, BUT TORR HAS ONLY A *GLIMPSE* OF IT BEFORE *GEMINI* ATTACKS--

IF I'VE LEARNED *ONE THING* ABOUT THIS MAD LAND--

--IT'S THAT *EVERY* CHAMBER IN IT HAS *TWO* DOORS!

YOU MAY HAVE SEALED *ONE*--

CRASH

--BUT IF I CAN JUST REACH THE *OTHER*--

EH?

FORGIVE ME.

I'M AFRAID I MUST HAVE MADE A TERRIBLE FIRST IMPRESSION.

HE ALWAYS DOES, YOU KNOW.

I CAN SENSE YOU'RE A *TWIN*... SO YOU MUST UNDERSTAND MY FRUSTRATION.

HE AND I HAVE *OPPOSITE* PERSONALITIES--BUT WE'RE *STUCK* WITH EACH OTHER, I'M AFRAID.

BY THE *GODS!* YOUR *REFLECTION* IN THAT MIRROR--!

ON *ONE* SIDE, YOU'RE A *SHADOW*--

--AND ON THE OTHER, YOU'RE A CREATURE OF *LIGHT*, AND SOME KIND OF *DEMON!*

CONFUSING, ISN'T IT?

I GUESS IT SIMPLY *MEANS* YOU'D BETTER STAY ON *MY* GOOD SIDE.

A LITTLE *GEMINI* JEST.

HERE... ALLOW ME TO MAKE *AMENDS* FOR ATTACKING YOU...

...WITH THIS *LAMP?*

IT HAS NO *MAGICAL POWERS* THAT I'M AWARE OF, BUT IT MIGHT HELP YOU IF THINGS GET *DARK.*

YOU'LL FIND THE SECOND DOOR *BEHIND* YOU.

WAIT! DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE *SWORD OF ULTIMATE SORCERY*--

--ALSO CALLED THE *TALISMAN* OF..

HE'S GONE... HE JUST FADED AWAY.

WHAT KIND OF LAND *IS* THIS?

ARE ITS *PEOPLE* CRAZY, OR AM I?

CRAZY OR NOT, I'M GOING TO KEEP *OPENING DOORS* UNTIL I--

THERE'S NO *CORRIDOR*-- NOTHING ON THE *OTHER SIDE* BUT--

--YEEOWW!

SPLASH!

OH... NO.. !

ELSEWHERE...

WHAT AN ODD CREATURE TAURUS IS... APPARENTLY, TORR BESTED HIM, AND TAURUS FOUND THAT AMUSING!

SO AMUSING, HE OFFERED ME SOME ADVICE AND HELP WHEN HE REALIZED WHO I WAS--

--TELLING ME TO TAKE THIS CORRIDOR TO THE CHAMBER ON HIS LEFT, WHERE HE SAID TORR WOULD BE WAITING FOR ME!

TORR! IT'S TARRA!

I'VE GOT A SURPRISE FOR YOU--

IS THAT SO, LITTLE GIRL?

AND ARIES HAS A SURPRISE FOR YOU, TOO!

ULP!

THE MINOTAUR LIED!

HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE -- BEFORE ARIES CAN REACH ME TO--

IN HER HAND, THE STAR GLOWS, AS IF SENSING HER DISTRESS, AND BETWEEN ONE BREATH AND THE NEXT--

-- SHE FINDS HERSELF TRANSPORTED, OUT OF THE FIRE AND INTO THE FURNACE...

GODS OF MY MOTHER!

HERMINUS, WHO IS THIS BOLD INTRUDER?

IS IT ONE OF THE THIEVES YOU WARNED ME ABOUT?

AYE, BRAVE SAGITTARIUS-- THE VIXEN CALLED TARRA!

SEE? SHE'S STOLEN THE STAR OF PASSAGE FROM SWEET VIRGO!

BE SWIFT, BEFORE SHE CAN VANISH AGAIN--!

TWOK!

OHH!!

GOOD SHOOTING, BRAVE WARRIOR!

HA! SHE DROPPED THE STAR!

NOW S MY CHANCE, WHILE THAT THICK-SKULLED CENTAUR KEEPS HER PINNED DOWN--!

THE STAR!

NO!

AND, ELSEWHERE...

I MUST ADMIT, GOOD FRIEND CRAB-- YOU GAVE ME QUITE A *FRIGHT* BACK THERE!

NOT MY INTENTION.

AM PEACEFUL, IF NOT ATTACKED.

THOUGH NOT ALWAYS TRUE, IF STAR-SIGNS ARE AWRY.

GO AND BE WELL, YOUNG WARRIOR... AND KNOW YOU HAVE FRIEND IN CANCER

I'M BEGINNING TO *UNDER-STAND.*

WAR-CRAFT MAY BE *USELESS* IN THIS LAND, WHERE *FOES* CAN BECOME FRIENDS AND *FRIENDS* CAN TURN INTO FOES!

I BETTER WARN *TARRA!*

IF I CAN *FIND* HER!

YET *ANOTHER* DOOR OPENS TO THE MAGIC KEY'S TOUCH, BUT WHEN TORR STEPS THROUGH INTO THE CHAMBER *BEYOND--*

--HE IS GREETED BY A ROAR OF *UNBRIDLED FURY!*

THIEF AND TRESPASSER!

HERMINUS WARNED ME THAT YOU WOULD COME, BEARING STOLEN TREASURES AND SPOUTING *LIES!*

WATCH HIM CAREFULLY, *KING LEO--*

HE'S A *TRICKY* ONE, HE IS!

I HAVE NO *PATIENCE* WITH TRICKSTERS, HERMINUS!

NO PATIENCE AT ALL!

RARRR

SCRASH!

YOU!

I DON'T KNOW *WHY* YOU DID THIS-- BUT YOU'RE GOING TO *TELL* HIM YOU *LIED!*

AT *THIS* POINT, YOU WHELP, I DOUBT HE'D *BELIEVE* ME!

OOF!

DOLT! YOU MADE ME DROP THE *STAR--!*

THAT THING MUST BE *IMPORTANT* IF YOU--

UH-OH!

ROWR

TWO HANDS REACH, BUT *ONE* REACHES FASTER--

--AND IN A FLASH OF *BLINDING LIGHT*, BOTH THIEVES ARE--

GONE!

HALF A BREATH LATER...

TARRA!

TWCHUNK

TORR, GET AWAY! SAGITTARIUS WON'T LISTEN TO REASON!

HE THINKS WE'RE BANDITS!

I'M FINDING YOUR RANGE, WENCH!

TARRA'S GETTING WINDED-- SHE CAN'T KEEP DODGING AND, AS LONG AS THAT ARMED CENTAUR IS BETWEEN US, I CAN'T REACH HER TO HELP!

WAIT-- MAYBE I CAN BLIND HIM BY TOSSING THIS CLOAK OVER HIS--

SIMULTANEOUSLY...

HUH?

NO SIGN OF TORR-- HE MUST HAVE ESCAPED!

AT LEAST ONE OF US WILL SURVIVE!

THIS IS IT..

...GODS HELP ME, I CAN'T RUN ANY FURTHER!

NOW I HAVE YOU!

YES, BUT CAN YOU *KEEP* HER?

NA-A-YYY!

SOMEONE'S *MOUNTED* ME--SOMEONE I *CANNOT* SEE!

SO... THE LUCKY BRAT FOUND THE *CLOAK OF INVISIBILITY!*

I'VE FOUND SOMETHING JUST AS *USEFUL*--THE *SHOES OF STEALTH!*

WEARING THESE, I CAN BE *SEEN*--BUT NOT *HEARD!*

THAT GIVES ME THE CHANCE I NEED TO *SLIP AWAY..*

...AND RETURN TO THIEVE *ANOTHER* DAY!

SEEN OR *UNSEEN*, MY ATTACKER HAS *WEIGHT*--

--AND WHAT HAS WEIGHT CAN BE *THROWN!*

BROTHER..?

NO TIME TO *EXPLAIN*, TARRA!

YOU'RE *NEAR* ENOUGH NOW!

QUICK, GRAB THE *STAR*, AND LET'S GET--

FLAAAM

--OUT OF HERE?

SOMETHING *HAPPENED* WHEN WE TOUCHED THE STAR *TOGETHER!*

THIS *ISN'T* ONE OF THE ZODIACAL CHAMBERS!

TORR, LOOK UP *THERE!*

WE'VE MADE IT TO THE *CENTRAL CHAMBER!*

THAT'S IT-- THAT'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN SEEKING--

--THE SWORD OF ULTIMATE SORCERY!

AWE TAKES THEIR BREATHS AWAY.

AS IF FORGED IN THE FIRES OF THE SUN, THE SWORD GLOWS WITH UNEARTHLY GLORY, SENDING A LANCE OF PURE ENERGY DOWN TO THE MARBLE BENEATH ITS POINT

THAT ZODIAC DISC! WE SAW IT BEFORE, WHEN OUR MENTORS SHOWED US THE SWORD!

TOR-- I JUST REALIZED--

--WHAT IF THE SWORD AND THE TALISMAN OF WHICH THEY SPOKE ARE TWO SEPARATE--

--THINGS?

NOW, SOMETHING INEXPLICABLE OCCURS...

WHERE THERE WAS ONE BLADE, THERE NOW ARE THREE; THE ORIGINAL... AND TWO OTHERS.

THE METAL FEELS WARM TO THEIR TOUCH WARM, AND SOMEHOW ALIVE.

TORR, SOMETHING'S HAPPENING!

SOMETHING, INDEED...

FZOOO

OOM!

THE FIRST SWORD-- IT'S BURNING A HOLE THROUGH THAT ALTAR-- INTO THE GROUND BELOW!

QUICKLY! DON'T LET IT--

--FALL!

OH, TORR-- WE'VE *LOST* IT!

YOU CANNOT LOSE THAT WHICH YOU NEVER *POSSESSED*, CHILD.

SWORDS YOU NOW HAVE--

--BUT THE *TRUE SWORD* WAS *NOT* YET YOURS.

WHAT HAVE YOU *LEARNED* IN THIS WORLD?

THAT BATTLES AREN'T *ALWAYS* WON BY VIOLENCE!

THEN YOU HAVE *LEARNED WELL*, AND HAVE BECOME *WISE SEEKERS* AS WELL AS *SKILLFUL THIEVES*.

BELOW LIES THE *SECOND WORLD* YOU MUST FACE, AS YOU CLAIM YOUR *DESTINY*.

IT TOO WILL *CHALLENGE* YOUR WITS, AND YOUR *SKILL*.

WILL YOU *MEET* THAT CHALLENGE?

WE'VE COME *THIS FAR*, MENTORR!

BY THE GODS, WE *WON'T* STOP *NOW*!

AND NEITHER WILL *HERMINUS*, FOOL--

--EVEN IF IT MEANS FOLLOWING TO THE VERY *GATES OF HADES!*

AND SO IT *ENDS*, WITH ANOTHER *BEGINNING*.

TORR, YOU MAY THINK I'M *MAD*, UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, BUT A *CHILL* JUST RAN DOWN MY *SPINE*--

--AS IF, SOMEHOW, SOMEWHERE, WE WERE BEING *WATCHED!*

IN HIS CASTLE KEEP, THE WIZARD *KONJURO* SMILES.

IT IS A SMILE WITHOUT *HUMOR*...

...A SMILE LIKE THE *GRIN OF DEATH!*

TO BE CONTINUED -- IN **SWORDQUEST** -- BOOK TWO: **FIREWORLD!**

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